



## Draft Environmental Assessment

### BLACKFOOT-CLEARWATER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA and E BAR L RANCH COOPERATIVE HABITAT MANAGEMENT LEASE AGREEMENT

#### PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

##### 1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to enter into a 6-year Cooperative Habitat Management Lease Agreement with E Bar L Ranch (O. W. Potter Exemption Trust). Under this arrangement, 17.4 acres of tame grass pasture on FWP's Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA) would be leased for livestock grazing in exchange for resting 151.6 acres of elk winter range on the E Bar L Ranch (Figure 1).

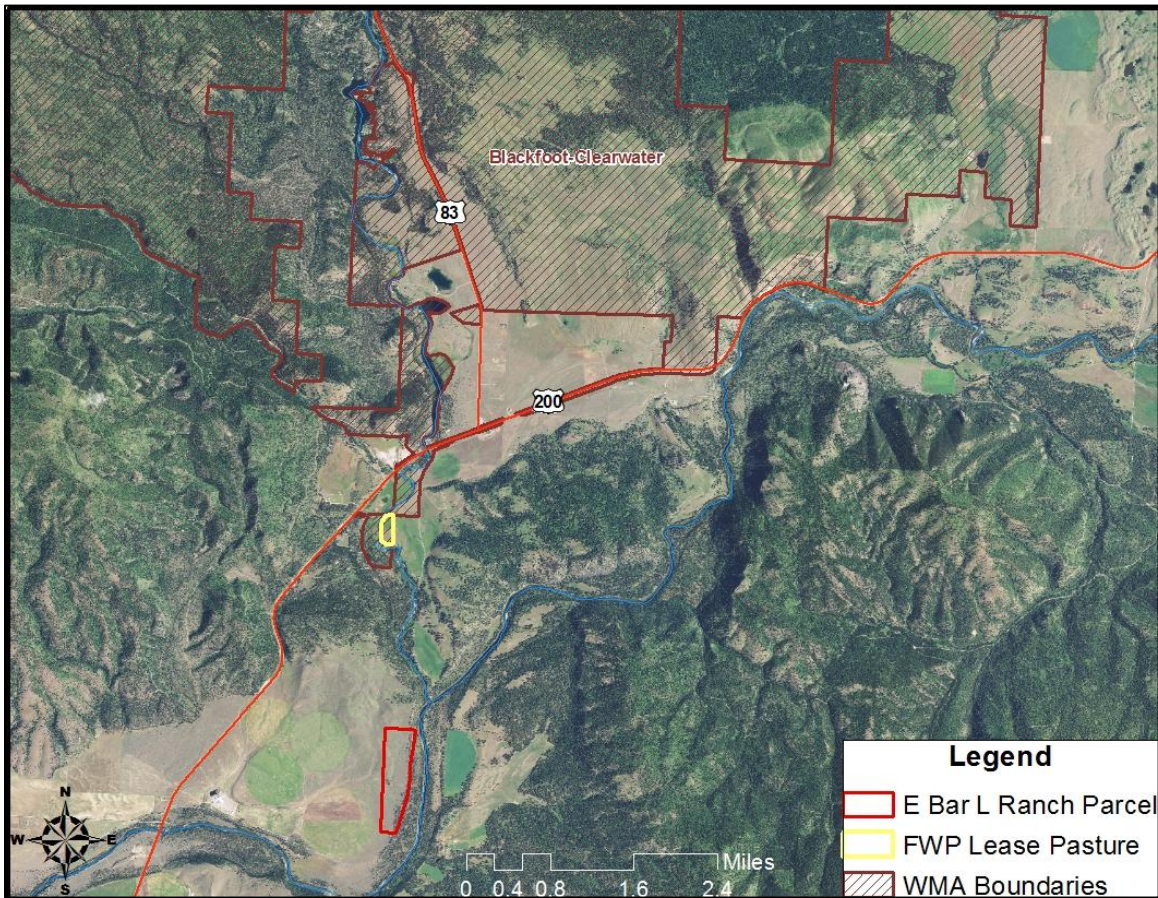


Figure 1. Proposed exchange-of-use locations between FWP and E Bar L Ranch.

**2. Agency authority for the proposed action:**

In accordance with Montana Code Annotated (MCA), FWP is authorized to acquire and operate land and enter into leases. Specifically, “the department may develop, operate, and maintain acquired lands or waters: . . . (b) as land or water suitable for game, bird, fish, or fur-bearing animal restoration, propagation, or protection” ( 87-1-209(1), MCA). “The department is authorized to enter into leases of land under its control in exchange for services to be provided by the lessee on the leased land” (87-1-209(7), MCA).

**3. Name of project:**

Blackfoot Clearwater WMA and E Bar L Ranch Cooperative Habitat Management Lease Agreement

**4. Anticipated Schedule:**

Estimated Commencement Date: October 1, 2015

Estimated Completion Date: December 15, 2020

**5. Location** affected by proposed action:

FWP-owned lands located in Missoula County (Appendix A, Figure 1):

Township 14 North, Range 14 West, Section 8, NE ¼

Leased land encompasses 17.4 acres in total.

E Bar L lease parcel located in Missoula County (Appendix A, Figure 1):

Township 14 North, Range 14 West, Section 21, W½ of the W½,

Land encompasses 151.6 acres in total.

**6. Project size:**

Approximately 17.4 acres of FWP-owned lands adjacent to the Clearwater River.

Approximately 151.6 acres of privately owned lands adjacent to the Blackfoot River.

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>17.4</u>
Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Rangeland	<u>151.6</u>
Areas		Other	<u>0</u>

**7. List any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.**

(a) **Permits:** None Required

(b) **Funding:** N/A

(c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:** None

**8. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:**

In 2008, FWP and the E Bar L Ranch (now, O. W. Potter Jr. Exemption Trust), entered into a cooperative management lease agreement that created an exchange-of-use grazing plan on 17.4 acres of the BCWMA adjacent to the Clearwater River along Sunset Hill Road and 152 acres of the E Bar L Ranch adjacent to the Blackfoot River.

The subject FWP lands were originally purchased to provide sportsman access to the Clearwater River. This pasture, comprised of tame grasses, was cultivated hay ground prior to FWP acquisition. Since FWP gained ownership, grazing has been intermittent and irrigation has been suspended. The larger 152-acre E Bar L pasture consists of native range and sagebrush and provides excellent year-round habitat for a variety of native wildlife (including spring calving and important winter range for elk) and provides high-quality nesting habitat for ground nesting bird species. The E Bar L pasture has been used by approximately 150 elk, annually (Appendix A, Figures 1 & 3).

Mike Frisina (FWP Range Specialist, *emeritus*), Jay Kolbe (FWP Area Wildlife Biologist), and Lois Vero (E Bar L Ranch) designed this exchange-of-use grazing plan in 2008. Specifically, the E Bar L Ranch grazes up to 10 AUMs (animal unit months) of horses in the late fall on the BCWMA in exchange for year-long deferment (permanent rest) from any livestock use of the E Bar L Ranch pasture.

Portions of the FWP parcel had significant infestations of spotted knapweed, leafy spurge, oxeye daisy, thistle, and other weeds prior to the inception of the previous 2008 lease with the E Bar L Ranch. The Ranch has annually treated weeds on the FWP lease and infestations are significantly reduced.

The fence dividing FWP lands from the adjacent E Bar L Ranch lands was in disrepair prior to 2008. Since then, the E Bar L has worked with FWP and replaced the previous fence with an electric, wildlife-friendly drop fence, which they have maintained to FWP requirements (Appendix A, Figure 2).

The E Bar L Ranch manages their adjacent hay field and grazes ranch horses there for several weeks each late fall during the general rifle hunting season in order to pasture horses in a safe location. Much of their remaining property is enrolled in a Block Management Area (BMA) with FWP. (Generally under the BMA program, FWP signs contracts with private landowners who in turn provide free public hunting access on their lands during fall hunting season/s.) The Ranch has since removed the boundary fence, treated weeds on the 17.4-acre FWP pasture, and grazed between the dates of October 15 and December 15 in conjunction with their adjacent pasture. FWP collaborated with the Ranch in erecting a single-wire electric fence along the west boundary of the FWP parcel to keep horses from entering the riparian area along the Clearwater River.

FWP proposes to extend (renew) the existing cooperative management lease agreement until December 15, 2020.

**9. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:**

**Alternative A: No Action**

Under the no action alternative, the grazing lease on the 17.4 acres of FWP-owned land would not be renewed, and livestock grazing would be excluded from this tame grass pasture. The result of no action would require the E Bar L Ranch to alter their current grazing management plans accordingly. In addition, the 152 acres of native pasture on the E Bar L Ranch would no longer be rested from livestock grazing.

Under the proposed action and previous agreement, maintenance of the FWP-owned pasture was the responsibility of the E Bar L Ranch. Maintenance duties included weed treatment and fence care between FWP and E Bar L Ranch properties. These maintenance duties would become the responsibility FWP under the no action alternative, and the boundary fence between the properties would need to be replaced.

Wildlife habitat benefits would potentially be compromised on the 152-acre native range under the no action alternative. If livestock grazing returned to the 152-acre parcel, forage that has been available to wintering elk under the cooperative agreement would likely instead be consumed by livestock and the presence of livestock may also displace elk calving in the area.

**Alternative B: Proposed Action**

Under the proposed action alternative FWP would renew a cooperative habitat grazing lease for 6 years with the E Bar L Ranch--a long-time cooperator with FWP. The grazing prescription calls for 10 AUMs of grazing (horses) during late fall on a 17.4-acre FWP pasture in exchange for year-long deferment of livestock grazing of a private 152-acre native range pasture with high wildlife habitat value. Lessee would be responsible for continuing fence maintenance and weed treatment of FWP land.

The proposed alternative would assure continued maintenance of FWP lands and provide significant wildlife habitat benefits for elk, deer, and ground-nesting bird species on 152 acres of native sagebrush grassland. The proximity of the 152-acre native range adds value to the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA, providing important winter range and calving grounds for a herd of approximately 150 elk. Furthermore, care and maintenance and late-season grazing by the E Bar L Ranch on the 17.4-acre FWP tame pasture enhances early-season forage green-up for elk and deer. FWP believes that renewing this Cooperative Habitat Management Agreement, as proposed, would maintain wildlife habitat in this area, continue important public-private habitat management partnerships, and help preserve public hunting access to highly valued private lands.

## **PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST**

Evaluation of the impacts of the **Proposed Action** including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

### **A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

1. <b><u>LAND RESOURCES</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X			1.b
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:		X				

1.b. Livestock grazing (horses) may cause soil disturbance within the fenced boundary of the 17.4 acre previously cultivated hay pasture and near watering sites. Potential soil disturbances caused by the proposed alternative is expected to be minimal on the grazed pasture (17.4 acres). Potential soil disturbances in the permanently rested pasture (152-acres) would remain negligible under the proposed alternative.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

2. <u>AIR</u>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other:		X				

No impacts are anticipated.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

3. <u>WATER</u>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?			X			3.a
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				
n. Other:		X				

3.a. Consistent with the previous lease agreement between FWP and E Bar L Ranch, under the proposed alternative, the lessee would be required to install fencing along the banks of the Clearwater River to exclude all grazing on stream bank vegetation to reduce erosion.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

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\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

4. <b>VEGETATION</b>  Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X			4.a
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X			4.b
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X			4.e
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				

4.a,b. The proposed late-season grazing is expected to reduce predominantly tame grass cover and quantity on the grazed area. At this time of year, herbaceous vegetation would be senescent, but the following spring, these grazed areas would provide enhanced green-up, particularly for elk and deer. The proposed agreement would ensure the 152-acre private parcel, comprised of native range and sagebrush, would be permanently rested from all livestock grazing.

4.e. Livestock can spread noxious weeds. Acres grazed by livestock would be monitored for new weed infestations. The lessee would be required to treat noxious weed infestations on the 17.4 grazed pasture.

\* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.



<b>** 5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u></b> <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X			5.b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?			X			5.c
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?		X				
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)			X			5.h
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				
j. Other:		X				

5.b,c. Livestock grazing activities would reduce the amount of winter forage in the 17.4 acre tame grass pasture. Big game could be displaced from this field. However, the removal of senescent residual vegetation should enhance spring green-up conditions and provide more palatable and attractive forage for grazing wildlife. FWP expects the proposed agreement to have a positive long-term impact on big game, particularly for wintering and calving elk in the 152 acre native pasture that would be permanently rested from all livestock grazing.

In regards to non-game impacts, the reduction in residual cover in the tame grass field could have a short term impact on any ground nesting birds that may utilize the area, but long term permanent rest from livestock grazing would allow the 152 acre native pasture to be utilized by ground nesting birds.

5.h. Grizzly bears inhabit the Blackfoot Valley and seasonally use riparian habitats for feeding and travel. Because of their generalist nature and large home ranges, the temporary use of a 17.4 acre pasture is not expected to adversely affect regular grizzly bear activity.

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\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

## B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <b><u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:		X				

No impacts are anticipated.

7. <b><u>LAND USE</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:		X				

No impacts are anticipated.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

<b>8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				
e. Other:			X			8.e

8.e. Chemical and biological treatment is part of FWP's weed management plan to limit the infestation of noxious weeds on its properties per the guidance of the 2008 Integrated Weed Management Plan. Weed treatment and storage and mixing of the chemicals would be in accordance with standard operating

<b>9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other:		X				

No impacts are anticipated.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources		X				10.e
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.		X				10.f
g. Other:		X				

10.e,f. No revenues are generated by the grazing lease on the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA. No additional costs to FWP are expected with the implementation of the proposed grazing lease, as the lessee would be responsible for maintenance of the pasture fences during the grazing period.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

\*\*\*\* Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

<b>** 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?				X		11.a
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)				X		11.c
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		X				
e. Other:		X				

11.a,c. Domestic livestock and signs of livestock use on the WMA may be objectionable to some segments of the public. This proposed agreement would continue to provide enhanced wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities for the public.

<b>12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT *</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		X				
e. Other:		X				

No impacts are anticipated.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

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## SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>  Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

No impacts are anticipated.

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\*\* Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

\*\*\* Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

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**2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

The grazing lease agreement between FWP and the lessee would include all lease stipulations and enforceable control measures.

**PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT**

Renewal of this proposed Cooperative Habitat Management Agreement would continue to provide maintenance to a 17.4-acre parcel of FWP property adjacent to the Clearwater River. The E Bar L Ranch would maintain fences and provide weed treatment on the FWP grazed pasture in exchange for late-season grazing up to 10 AUM. In addition, the E Bar L Ranch would exclude all grazing from a 151.6-acre native grass pasture important for elk winter range.

FWP believes that renewing this Cooperative Habitat Management Agreement, as proposed, would maintain wildlife habitat in this area, maintain important public-private habitat management partnerships, and help preserve an effective working relationship with neighboring private property that also provides public hunting access.

**PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

**1. Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Legal notices will be published once in each of these newspapers: *Independent Record* (Helena), *Missoulian*, and *Seeley Swan Pathfinder* (Seeley Lake).
- Public notice will be posted on FWP's webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News," then "Public Notices"). The Draft EA will also be available on this webpage, along with the opportunity to submit comments online.
- Direct mailing or email notification will be made to adjacent landowners and other interested parties (individuals, groups, agencies) to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

Copies of this draft EA may be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula 59804; by phoning 406-542-5540; by emailing [shrose@mt.gov](mailto:shrose@mt.gov); or by viewing FWP's Internet website <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Public Notices," beginning March 30, 2015).

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

**2. Duration of comment period, if any.**

The public comment period will extend for thirty (30) days following the publication of the legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on April 28, 2015 and can be mailed to the address below:

Comments should be directed by:

Mail to FWP Region 2, Attn: Sharon Rose, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804;

Phone to 406-542-5540; or

Email to [shrose@mt.gov](mailto:shrose@mt.gov).

Comments must be received by FWP no later than 5:00 p.m. on April 28, 2015.

**PART V. EA PREPARATION**

**1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?**

No.

**If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

An EA is appropriate for this project based on the minimal and no impact findings of the proposed activity. As a renewal grazing lease with no new proposed action, the finding of no impacts are considered appropriate.

**2. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Scott Eggeman,  
Region 2 Area Wildlife Biologist  
3201 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804  
406-542-5542  
[seggeman@mt.gov](mailto:seggeman@mt.gov)

**3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:**

None



## APPENDIX A

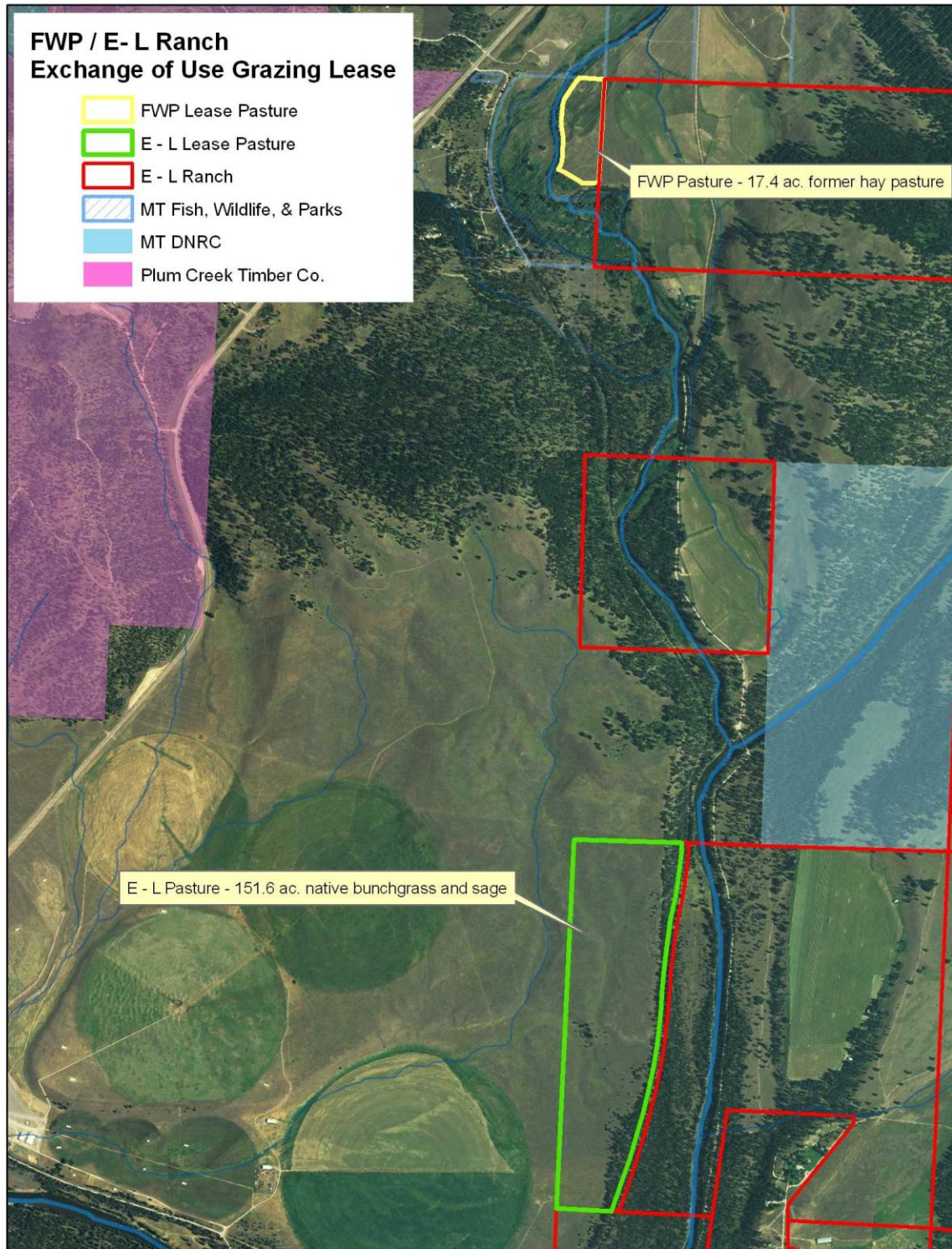


Figure 1. Map of land owned by FWP and by E Bar L Ranch that is included in the exchange of use cooperative management agreement.



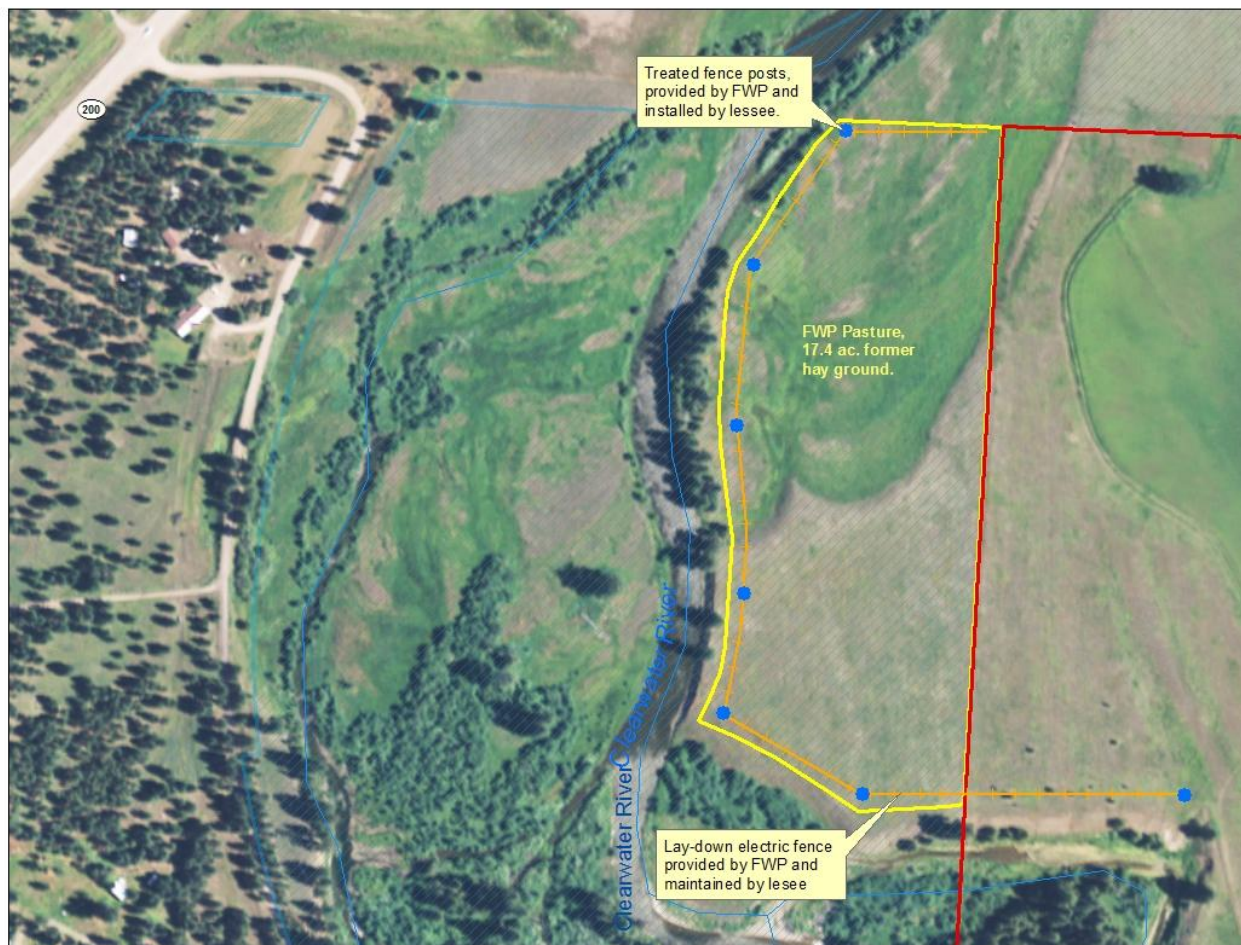


Figure 2. Aerial map of the former hay field, comprised of tame grasses, and infrastructure to be maintained by the lessee.



Figure 3. Photo of the 152-acre E Bar L Ranch native-range pasture to be rested year-round, in exchange for use of FWP's 17.4-acre cultivated pasture.

## **TERMS OF PAYMENT AND SERVICES PROVIDED**

1. A maximum of 10 AUMs would be provided under terms of this grazing lease, annually on the 17.4 acres of FWP land, between the dates of October 15 and December 15.
2. Value of this grazing lease would be determined annually based on the standard rate for that year. In 2014, the rate was \$21.00 per AUM for a total value of \$210.00.
3. Payment for this grazing lease shall be considered from exchange of use of land and additional services provided by the lessee. They are generally outlined below:
  - a. Exchange of Use
    - i. Approximately 152 acres controlled by the lessee shall be managed to promote elk use in the winter and during calving in the spring.
    - ii. The lessee shall adhere to the grazing prescription described in the grazing lease that will include complete rest from grazing annually on the 152 acre pasture.
  - b. Services Provided
    - i. Conduct annual wildlife-friendly fence maintenance and repair, including setting up and taking down of temporary fence.
    - ii. Control weeds in the FWP pasture.